



19<sup>th</sup> Annual  
FAMILY LEARNING WEEKEND for  
FAMILIES OF Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children  
June 12-14, 2015



What: MSDB 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Learning Weekend for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing  
Where: MSDB Campus in Great Falls  
When: June 12-14, 2015  
Who: Families of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children living in Montana!  
Why: IT WILL BE FUN!!

The Learning Weekend is a creative program providing opportunities for families of sensory impaired children to learn about deafness, share their experiences with other families, and learn how to communicate more fully with one another in a warm, caring atmosphere.

The focus of the weekend is to enhance each individual's personal knowledge of deafness and how it relates to the education and development of their child. Informal workshops, group discussions (parent groups, kids' groups, siblings' groups, etc.) and hands-on activities will be offered. Child care and recreation for the children (siblings included) is available at no charge. Families will be reimbursed for mileage at the current state rate.

Housing is provided on a first-come first-serve basis. Each family is generally provided with their own suite of rooms in the cottages and efforts are made to make assignments according to individual needs and preferences. Typically each family has their own bathroom, sometimes two, depending on the size of the family. **Participants need to bring personal items such as soap, shampoo and toothpaste. Make sure you bring your swimsuit!**

#### Children's Programs:

The children are divided into groups based mostly on age. Many factors are taken into consideration including friendships, maturity level, and interests when putting together the groups. The children stay with their groups until they join the parents for mealtime. MSDB's finest residential and school staff will be responsible for supervising your children and making sure they enjoy the day as much as you do!

**Birth to two:** Children will be in the pre-school room in Bitterroot with staff. *Parents should pick up their children prior to lunch and dinner and return them to the same location when they are done eating.*

**Three to five:** Children will be involved in a variety of activities throughout the day. These activities will include snacks, program practice, indoor and outdoor activities including a trip to the MSDB playground (weather permitting). Swimming, with parents, in the Mustang Center will be available for this age group from 4:45–5:45. The activities for this group will remain flexible depending on the ages and abilities of the participants.

**Six through eighteen:** Saturday morning after the group picture, children will re-join their assigned teams which are designed for children to be involved with peers. There will be several activities including program practice, recreation activities and snacks. In addition, a representative from the Montana Telecommunications Access Program (MTAP) will have fun projects for the children to enjoy. MTAP will talk about technology, including using a TTY, the Relay Service, etc. Also during the morning session Yvette Smail, MSDB Behavior Specialist, will meet with hearing siblings providing them an opportunity to discuss their feelings regarding having a deaf sibling. Deaf and Hard of Hearing children will meet separately to share their thoughts as well. *This information (while keeping siblings' names confidential) will be shared with the parents during the Sunday morning presentation.*

In addition, **Beca Squires**, the keynote presenter will spend time with the middle school and high school deaf and hard of hearing students on Saturday and present them with information to empower them to be the best that they can be. She will share some of her presentation from Saturday morning that will no doubt captivate the attention of the students!

*\*\*\*The kids program is intended to provide entertainment and educational activities that will further the participants understanding of deafness and its impact on the family. Activities are designed for youth with hearing loss and for their siblings. Participants are grouped by age and staff are assigned accordingly, depending on the numbers of the participants and their individual needs. If you have unique concerns regarding your child, please let us know and we will work with you to insure that everyone has a good time.*

*Information from various vendors (serving Deaf and Hard of Hearing) may be available throughout the weekend.*

## Presenter Bios

**John Fechter**, State Outreach Manager, is responsible for directing outreach personnel and activities to ensure that all state outreach activities are carried out according to specific objectives with the end goal being to increase the number of outreach activities and the effectiveness of marketing programs. John has been with Hamilton for almost 9 years. Prior to joining Hamilton Relay, John worked at Wells Fargo Bank for 14 years, served as a Business Lending Underwriter, Credit Analyst and Personal Banking Officer. As a volunteer for more than 14 years, John served as President of the Metro Deaf School Board, being board member for two non-profit organizations. John received his BA degree in Management from Gallaudet University. John resides near Minneapolis, MN and has two children who are deaf. In addition, John was born in Bozeman, Montana in 1967 and has relatives still live in Montana. In his presentation John will cover all aspects of his life including his successes and challenges.

**Frank Podobnik** currently serves as the State Special Education Director for the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI). Frank is the father of three sons, two of whom were students with disabilities. He began his career in education as a school psychologist in 1994 and worked in the Great Falls and Butte school districts. Frank has worked for the OPI since 2002 as a full and part-time compliance monitor, dispute resolution facilitator, IDEA grant manager, and for the last year, state director. Frank has worked with teachers, families and students with disabilities throughout his career.

**Anibelka "Beca" Henriquez Squires** is currently an Admissions Counselor for the west region at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. She received a B.S. degree in Biology and a M.A. in School of Counseling and Guidance at Gallaudet. She also attended a state university for her first master's degree in Special Education. Her background includes a student worker, an elementary lead teacher, and a trilingual interpreter. Before arriving to the only Deaf university, she was a mainstream student living in three cultures and using three languages on a regular basis. Her parents are from the Dominican Republic, making her the first generation in her family in America. She is also the first to receive a college education. Spoken Spanish is her first language, which led to English and American Sign Language. In her presentation, Anibelka will cover her experience as a Latina growing up in the hearing world; attending public schools with or without accommodations, and her motivation to invest beyond her bachelor's degree. This is an opportunity for parents, students and professionals to witness a young lady's life experience, one that has driven her to be where she is today. There are no barriers but hope!

**Donna Sorensen** has studied and worked in the field of Deaf Education since 1988. Her BA is in Deaf Education from the University of Montevallo and her MA is in Parent-Infant Education from Gallaudet University. She completed an Interpreter Training Program in Seattle. She is also a National Board Certified Teacher. She served in the United States Peace Corps from 2003-2005 teaching deaf students in Webuye, Kenya. After returning to the States, she got her principal certification from Washington State University. She is currently studying in the Teacher for Visual Impairments program at Texas Tech University. She loves to keep learning! Donna has been the MSDB Superintendent since August of 2014 and prior to this appointment was the Outreach Program Supervisor and has the opportunity to travel the state and visit many families, schools and other professionals in the field.

# Deaf Learning Weekend 2015 Schedule

(subject to change)

## Friday, June 12, 2015

- 4:00-6:00 *Check in:* Yellowstone Cottage.  
6:00-6:30 *Tour:* Especially helpful for first time attendees.  
6:30-7:15 *Dinner:* Pizza, salad and dessert in the MSDB main dining room.  
7:15-8:00 *Ice Breaker:* Getting to know the participants a bit earlier in the weekend.  
8:00-9:00 *Teen Panel:* Opportunity for teens to share their experiences and answer any audience questions (this is a **must** for the parents).  
7:15-9:00 All of the children will go to the Mustang Center to meet their “groups” and work on the program for Saturday night.  
9:00 Pick up your kids from the Mustang Center.

## Saturday, June 13, 2015

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast in the main dining room.  
8:45-9:00 Group Picture – All Participants together in front of the big sign (each family will get a “Memory Book” at the end of the weekend to take home).  
9:00-12:00 *A Young Women’s Journey to Success in America!:* **Anibelka "Beca" Henriquez Squires**  
Beca will share her experience as a Latina growing up in the hearing world; attending public schools with or without accommodations, and her motivation to invest beyond her bachelor’s degree. This is an opportunity for parents, students and professionals to witness a young lady’s life experience, one that has driven her to be where she is today. There are no barriers but hope!  
12:00-12:45 Lunch  
12:45-1:45 Pick one session
  - *OPI – IEP’s:* **Frank Podobnik** and *OPI* will review the laws, some changes and provide you with information to help develop an **effective and useful IEP** for your child!
  - *ASL:* **Selected MSDB Staff** – will present a “**Fun Session**” on **ASL** that will be new and exciting  
1:45-2:00 Break  
2:00-3:00 *Audiology Information and Questions:* **Kathy Johnson**, MSDB Audiologist will discuss various issues in regards to hearing aids, audiograms and some recent findings in the audiology field. Kathy will also have a question and answer session. Kathy has over 30 years of experience as a pediatric Audiologist and is a wealth of information for any family.  
3:30-5:00 Parent groups (two sessions for the moms and one for the dads)  
5:00-6:15 Open swim time for families  
6:00-6:50 *BBQ:* In the main dining room.  
7:00-7:30 *Children’s Show:* The children have been practicing all day to put on a short performance for the parents. **Bring your cameras and tissue!**  
7:40-9:00 *Parent Panel:* This has also been a favorite of the weekend. Listen to parents as they share their story about their journey with their child. It is uplifting and empowering to be a part of this presentation (as a participant or a member of the audience).  
9:30 Pick up your kids from the cottages as they will be watching movies and eating snacks

## Sunday, June 14, 2015

- 7:45-8:45 Breakfast  
9:00-9:30 *Montana Telecommunications Access Program and Hamilton Relay:* information about this wonderful program.  
9:30-10:30 *Successful Adult Presentation:* **John Fechter** will present to the parents (see bio).  
10:30-11:00 *Apps for Deaf and Hard of Hearing:* This session will identify many of the useful apps the consultants have utilized in their work with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children throughout the state. Handouts will be available in this session.  
11:00 -11:30 *Sibling Summary:* Listen to what your children have to say about having a deaf or hard of hearing sibling AND also what the deaf or hard of hearing kids think about living in a hearing family! Some surprises and thought provoking information for all parents.  
11:30 Lunch in the dining room and then families depart.



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**WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID ABOUT MSDB's FAMILY LEARNING WEEKENDS!**

*"I think every family with a deaf child should come to at least one to see if it's helpful to them – we love it and learn each and every time we come to MSDB!"*

*"I like that my brother feels welcome and fits in every time he is here and I support him."*

*"I was very impressed with MSDB in general. I had no idea that this was such a 'gem'. Montana is very lucky."*

*"Informative, we met a lot of amazing families, the staff was great and the kids had fun"*

*"Seeing all the kids together is the best part! We always learn something new that helps us with our lives!"*

*"The staff are great, always different options for presenters – changes every year"*

**SPONSORED BY:**

The Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind ♦ The M.S.D.B. Foundation, Inc.  
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Mailing Label